

GORBACHEV CALLS LITHUANIA'S MOVE AN 'ALARMING' STEP

KREMLIN'S PLAN UNCLEAR

Soviet Chief Tells Legislature to Scrutinize Republic's Vote on Independence

By **ESTHER B. FEIN**

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MOSCOW, March 12 — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev today described Lithuania's declaration of independence as "alarming," but he gave no indication of what the Kremlin's next move would be.

He said the decision on Sunday by the Lithuanian parliament should be examined by the Soviet national legislature, which convened today in a special session.

But neither Mr. Gorbachev nor other Soviet officials said whether Moscow would recognize the independence of Lithuania, which was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 after 22 years as a sovereign nation.

'Fundamental Interests'

"The information coming from there is alarming," Mr. Gorbachev said. "The decisions that are being taken affect the fundamental interests and destiny of the republic itself, of the people and of our entire state."

Mr. Gorbachev has struggled over the last few months to persuade Lithuanian leaders to abandon their campaign for independence. The Soviet President's remarks, at the opening of the special session of the Congress of the People's Deputies, offered no indication of whether he would negotiate with Lithuanian leaders.

Lithuania's resolution was the first issue raised by Mr. Gorbachev before the congress, which was hastily convened so that it could adopt a new law expanding the executive powers of the presidency.

He said the congress should begin analyzing the implications of Lithuania's proclamation, which was approved by the Baltic republic's parliament in a 124-to-0 vote.

Anxiety in Moscow and Vilnius

Mr. Gorbachev did not elaborate. In recent days he had warned that Moscow would press billions of rubles in claims on the republic if it seceded, and he challenged Lithuania's boundaries. There was anxiety today at the congress in Moscow, as in Vilnius, Lithuania's capital, about what the Kremlin intended to do.

"It's one of the traditions of the Soviet Union — the use of force," warned Yuri R. Boyars, a deputy from the Baltic republic of Latvia, where popular calls for independence have been pushing local legislators along a similar course.

But Yegor K. Ligachev, a hard-line member of the Communist Party's ruling Politburo, categorically ruled out the use of force in Lithuania.

"We will not use force," Mr. Ligachev told reporters during a break in the session. "We must resolve this by political means. Tanks will not help in this matter."

None of the other Soviet deputies

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Gorbachev Is 'Alarmed' Yet Laconic on Lithuania

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specifically mentioned Lithuania during the session today. But underlying many of the speeches was a recognition that Lithuania exemplified the nationalist and ethnic forces that are dividing the country, sometimes producing violence.

Vice President Anatoly I. Lukyanov told the congress that the Soviet Union was experiencing "flashes of nationalist fanaticism," and he complained of "primitive manipulation of national groups."

In their public speeches and in their conversations in the corridors, several deputies said they feared Mr. Gorbachev might use the far-reaching executive powers he is seeking to crush nationalist or separatist movements.

The spokesman for the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Gennadi I. Gerasimov, warned today that despite the declara-

tion of independence, Moscow's relationship with Lithuania was still a "domestic matter."

He cautioned the United States and other Western countries against "instructing us what to do," saying that such a move "could only be described as interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union."

Mr. Gerasimov was clearly referring to a statement issued Sunday by the Bush Administration urging the Soviet Union to respect Lithuania's decision.

Like other Soviet officials, Mr. Gerasimov refrained from saying whether Moscow would recognize Lithuania's independence, or what their relationship would be. He said that in practical terms, "there arises a host of difficult problems and counterclaims, both on the union's side and on that of the republic."

Lithuania, he said, is "presently unable to stand on its own two feet." As an example, he cited Lithuania's purchases of petroleum from the Soviet Union at heavily subsidized prices.

A Problem for the West

The Lithuanian declaration is far more nettlesome for the West than for Moscow, Mr. Gerasimov said, because those countries face "a very unpleasant legal problem" in deciding whether "to recognize or not to recognize" Lithuania's sovereignty.

There was scarcely any mention today of Lithuania's decision in the Soviet press. The few accounts were straightforward, brief and without commentary. Pravda, the Communist party newspaper, buried five paragraphs from the official news agency Tass in a lower corner of an inside page. The Government newspaper Izvestia ran a slightly longer article that was equally inconspicuous.

After Soviet television broadcast a delayed tape of Mr. Gorbachev's opening remarks to the congress, including his statement on Lithuania, the main

Moscow warns the West not to meddle in its 'internal affairs.'

evening news program, Vremya, aired a brief report from Vilnius.

The scarcity of information in the media was evident today in interviews with people in the streets of Moscow. Many did not know the new Lithuanian parliament had met, or precisely what decision it had reached.

Muscovites Unruffled

The decision came as no surprise to people here, who have been watching Lithuania's increasingly confident march toward independence for nearly two years.

"They decided this long ago," said a woman who had been chatting with two friends near an art printing shop. She declined to give her name.

"The other two Baltic republic will follow, one, two, right after," another woman said. She said she doubted the decision would have any impact on her life or on the nation's stability.

Without exception, people interviewed said that Lithuania had the right to secede from the Soviet Union, although several people questioned the wisdom and the timing of the vote.

"I think it was too hasty — nothing good will come out of it," said Nikolai Selivanov, a retired military officer who lives just outside the city.

"They have the right, sure they have the right," he said. "But they also have the right to live with the consequences. For instance, nobody will let them go before they pay Moscow for everything we built there, all the ports, the plants, the industries."

Mr. Gorbachev reportedly has told Lithuanian leaders that the price for independence would be about 33 billion rubles, payable in hard currency only. But the Lithuanians, and leaders in the other two Baltic republics, Estonia and Latvia, say they have a bigger bill to present to the Soviet Union, for 50 years of illegal occupation, the ravaging of their environment by Soviet industry and the deportation and execution of countless countrymen under Stalin.

Vladimir I. Konstantinov, the deputy director of an educational enterprise in Moscow, who was shopping late in the day at a farmers' market, said he sympathized with the Lithuanians' motivation for declaring independence. But he said he was "for constructive decisions, not emotional ones."

"It was an irresponsible step, mostly for the republic itself," he said. "For example, it's no secret that Lithuania has no raw materials. How will they get them now? How will they pay for them? Independence is not just a notion. It is a reality."

Muslim Militants Are Seized In Egyptian Religious Strife

CAIRO, March 12 (AP) — The police today arrested 11 Muslim militants accused of fanning sectarian violence, and their leader was reportedly electrocuted when he jumped out a window onto power lines while fleeing the authorities, an official said.

In raids in Minya province, the police also seized thousands of leaflets and weapons reportedly used in clashes between Egypt's Muslim majority and its Coptic Christian minority, said Interior Minister Abdel-Halim Moussa.

The Interior Minister, whose remarks were distributed by the official news agency, said the man who reportedly leaped to his death in Minya was the leader of the militants. But state-owned newspapers identified him as Sherif Saber Mohammed, a technician.